Central American NEWSLETTER

Newsletter of the Central American Group of the Spanish Main Society.

Editor: Michael P Birks, Flixton Girls' School, Urmston, Manchester M31 3DR, England 061-747 5924 (Home)

Vol III, Nº.55 April 1994

CONTENTS

SOME NOTES ON THE COSTA RICAN PROVISIONAL HIGH VALUE AIRMAIL STAMPS OF 1931

by RICHARD SAUNDRY 286

RAILWAYS IN THE PANAMA CANAL ZONE

by DR ANTHONY GOODBODY 293

SEEBECK OFFICIAL SEALS OF EL SALVADOR

by BILL WELCH 298

A FURTHER INSTRUCTIONAL MARK OF NICARAGUA

by DENIS KILNER 300

NICARAGUA: A NEW VARIETY

from Richard Washburn 297

The **Central American Group** is a part of the **Spanish Main Philatelic Society,** the leading Society in the world for collectors of Latin America. The journal of the SMPS is 'The Mainsheet', published quarterly, and is available by annual subscription from the Secretary, Brian Moorhouse, PO Box 105, PETERBOROUGH PE3 8TQ, England. Phone 0733 268708. Subscription is currently £8 in Europe or $20 elsewhere. Cheques in sterling or US$ should be made payable to 'The Spanish Main'. A three year subscription of £21/$54 and a five year subscription of £30/$80 are available and payment for these longer subscriptions may be made by Access, Mastercard or Visa.

The **Central American Group** caters for collectors of Mexico to Panama. Its journal, which you are now reading, is published quarterly, and is available by annual subscription. The subscription is currently £5 in Europe or £6 elsewhere. Dollar bills, or sterling cheques payable to 'The CA Group' should be sent to the treasurer, Colin Eddleston, 19 Sion Hill, BATH BA1 2UJ, England. Phone 0225 315608. We shall be pleased to forward the relevant portions of multi-subscription cheques to the SMPS or the Chile Group.

Back issues are available to members at 75p/$1.50 each, although issues 1-20 inclusive can be purchased for £10/$20 complete. Non-members may request a sample copy for 75p/$1.50 post paid. Requests for back issues should be sent to the Editor, to whom cheques should be made payable.

The group leader is Richard Saundry, Gwrych Cottage, Godstone Road, Bletchingley, REDHILL, Surrey RH1 4PL, England. Phone 0883 742186.

The Group does not run a packet. The SMPS Packet Secretary is Brian Sylvester, 3 Russel Court, St Lukes Road, MAIDENHEAD, Berks SL6 7AP, England. Phone 0628 784555.

Although most packets are of a general nature, there are occasional specialised one country packets. Good and unusual material is always wanted.

Owing to insurance difficulties, the packet is not available to overseas members, although we shall be pleased to accept material for inclusion in the packet from them.

The Auctioneer of the SMPS is Brian Moorhouse, to whom Auction and Private Treaty lots should be sent. Brian is a dealer, and will include your name on his mailing list if requested.

Central American NEWSLETTER

Newsletter of the Central American Group of the Spanish Main Society.

Editor: Michael P Birks, Flixton Girls' School, Urmston, Manchester M31 3DR, England 061-747 5924 (Home)

Vol III, Nº.55 April 1994

EDITORIAL

Many of you will have seen the dates for future meetings published in the January edition of Mainsheet. Unfortunately **the dates published in Mainsheet are incorrect.**

A small room has been booked at the Victory Services Club on Saturday **7th** May, details of which will be in the next issue of Mainsheet. A similar room has also been booked for Saturday **29th** October.

It had been my intention to arrange another provincial meeting in Manchester this year and for the last few months I have been loking for a suitable venue. I lost my membership of the local Conservative Club by being three days late with my subscription (they refused to accept my money and said I would have to re-apply!). I have not been successful in finding suitable alternative accommodation and so it is with deep regret that I reluctantly concede defeat. I do hope that other members of our Club will be more successful in the future.

I have had a request from Richard Yudin, PO Box 5600, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33340, USA, who is preparing an article, possibly to be expanded into a handbook, on the postal markings found on legitimate SCADTA covers. Covers with Central American stamps and/or marking are rather scarce and he would very much like to hear from anyone who may have any.

Our request for material for a Nicaraguan packet has not provided a sufficient response for this to be a reality, so for the time being it looks as though this will not happen. However do not let this deter you from offering material to the main packet which needs good material from all Republics.

For fourteen years I believed that my 1980 miniature sheets were complete. I now find that I lack the Zeppelin sheet, imperforate, with the gold overprint. If anyone can offer me this sheet I would be very pleased to hear from them.

mpb

SOME NOTES ON THE COSTA RICAN PROVISIONAL HIGH VALUE AIRMAIL STAMPS OF 1931

by RICHARD SAUNDRY

There has always been an air of mystery surrounding the Costa Rican high value provisional airmail stamps of December 1931. There is still today continuing uncertainty as to why these stamps were ever issued and how it was these stamps were cornered by two speculators. Furthermore the number of stamps printed and sold are not known with absolute certainty. Many collectors contend, since these stamps probably never saw regular postal use, that they should be deemed undesirable. Background information about these stamps has largely not been recorded in the European philatelic press. The only worthwhile article in English is that of the American Paulsen K Bailey (Oxcart (1963) N°.11 pp 110-17) who distilled into a very readable article most prior writings on the subject. This was followed by a 'philatelic forum' that appeared in Oxcart in 1984 (N°.94, pp 12-15) which recapitulated much of the earlier article of Bailey but with valuable additions contributed by Alex A Cohen and Fred O'Neill G..

I have acquired a couple of complete sets of this issue, including the second, or reprinted, set of 1932. I also have a philatelically contrived cover, and have seen a photocopy of a similar cover in a collection of my good friend Mark Spycher of Switzerland. Difficulties encountered deciding which of the two printings were which, trying to comprehend ambiguous information available in the standard catalogues, and with the realisation that little on the subject is readily available to the British reader, made me think it a worth-while exercise to collate much of that which is known so that others might appreciate the problems encountered with these issues.

Historical Background

Costa Rica began regular airmail services following the inauguration of United States FAM Routes 5 and 8, commencing 11 March 1930. It is one of those great mysteries that will in all probability never be fully explained why Costa Rica, which had for some considerable time been desperate for regular airmail services, did not issue a proper set of airmail definitive stamps for a further four years. For this initial period Costa Rica made do with a succession of provisional overprinted stamps. Equally amazing, since it was patently obvious that airmail tariffs would of necessity be high, the Costa Rican Post Office only issued low value overprinted stamps which hardly catered for the needs they were supposed to serve. A pleasing (at least to philatelic eyes) characteristic of Costa rican airmail covers of this period was the need to use multiple frankings to satisfy even the most basic of airmail postal rates.

By December 1931 FAM Routes 9 and 10 had been extended down both coasts of South America as far as Buenos Aires. It has been suggested that one possible reason the high value provisional airmail stamps were issued was that an agreement had been entered into between Costa Rica and Pan Am in November 1931 changing airmail rates to Colombia and to Argentina. This is almost certainly erroneous since Costa Rica had defined airmail tarrifs to all South American Republics from the very beginning of airmail services in March 1930. H Dana Mitchell (Costa Rican Philatelist, (1955), Vol.32 pp 12-15), whose writings can invariably be relied upon, states these rates remained in place until 1 October 1932. In other words the reason for issuing high value provisional airmail stamps has probably nothing to do with a change of airmail tariffs made in November 1931. What cannot be overstated, however, was that airmail rates to such distant places as Argentina and Uruguay were always extremely high (C1.80 ctmos per 15 grams or fraction thereof, plus 10 ctmos surface letter rate). A cover in my collection sent from San Jose to Buenos Aires in October 1930 confirms Mitchell's rates. Most authors state that if high denomination stamps were needed for even the basic letter rates, just think of the problem in franking heavier items such as parcels*.

In November 1931 the highest denomination stamp available in Costa Rica was the 1 colon definitive (SG 147) issued in 1923 of which precious few would have remained available for use. Furthermore, since the Costa Rican Post Office wanted to keep separate accounts of air and surface postage it was mandatory to use airmail stamps for the airmail part of the postage with the result that the high value stamp of 1923 was ineligible for airmail use. In March 1930 Costa Rica had issued for public use four airmail surcharges on official stamps (SG 177-180) of which only 12,000 copies of the 1 colon surcharged stamp were authorised. Small wonder that this exceedingly small issue was soon used up; in fact examples found on airmail letters other than contemporary first flight covers are exceedingly scarce. There was an overwhelming case to provide high value airmail stamps.

Issue of Stamps of the First Printing

By Decree Nº.758 of 10 December 1931, published in La Gazeta, 19 December, the public were informed that the President, Don Cleto Gonzalez Viquez, had authorised the over-printing for airmail use remaindered C2.00 and C10.00 values of the 1929 series, and the C5.00 value of the 1930 series, of fiscal stamps previously supplied to the Costa Rican government by the American Bank Note Company. 2,000 copies of the C2.00 air surcharge on the C2.00 fiscal, 2,000 copies of the C3.00 surcharge on the C5.00 value and 1,500 copies of the C5.00 surcharge on the C10.00 value were authorised. Since it is believed 500

[*Incidentally I have never seen a piece from an airmail parcel of this period and am wondering if parcels could be carried inder the existing airmail system. This would be well worth reporting and if such items exist they would be decided rarities.]

copies of each vaslue would have been set aside for distribution to UPU countries, the balance available for sale to the public was only 1,000 complete sets plus a further 500 copies of each of the two lower denominations.

The date of issue of these stamps (SG 187-189) is not known with certainty. Most authorities quote this as being 19 December, although Bailey states that many contemporary columns (presumably by this he meant local newspapers) carried the date as being 18 December. Since it was the standard procedure to issue stamps on the same day as publication of the decree authorising their circulation it is likely that 19 December was the actual date of issue. In support of that date Bailey said he had privately produced a first day of issue cover, bearing all three stamps, sent 19 December to Hollywood, USA and properly backstamped.

Whatever was the intended first date of issue, however, was purely academic since when the post office in San Jose opened for business on the morning of 19 December there were no longer any stamps available. The complete issue had been bought up apparently the day before by two speculators, Ernesto Quiros Aguilar (who at that time was in charge of the Stamp and Fiscal Paper Department of the Bank of Costa Rica and acted as fiscal agent for the government and who would therefore have had easy access to the newly printed stamps), and Ernesto Hammer, a stamp dealer in Nicaragua.

This 'cornering' of a complete issue by speculators engendered much criticism, not only by the philatelists who had missed out, but also by a representative in the Costa Rican parliament. In Dario de Costa Rica the next day, 20 December, appeared the headlines "DEPUTY JIMINEZ ORTIZ YESTERDAY DENOUNCED IN CONGRESS A NEW AND SCANDALOUS BUSINESS IN POSTAGE STAMPS". Part of Ortiz' statement was described by Bailey: "... today, Saturday,when the windows where the stamps are sold were opened up this morning, not a single one could be acquired by the public. That is to say that the issue was made only and exclusively for the benefit of those who inspired the business". It is interesting that Sr Ortiz obliquely charged the speculators with not only having bought all the stamps, but also of having played a part in causing the issue to be printed in the first place. The role of Quiros and Hammer in this shady business will, in all probability, never be fully explained.

Ortiz' outburst did not go unheeded. Two days afterwards (21 December) it was decreed (Decree Nº.784) that the number of surcharged stamps was to be increased by a further 10,000 of each value. Thus was authorised a second printing (stamps issued ?20 June 1932) by which the Costa Rican authorities hoped to reinstate their reputation in philatelic circles, and also that the speculators 'should get their fingers burnt'.

The Second Printing

A likely reason that stamps from the additional printing were not available until the following June was presumably because there were no longer available remaindered fiscal stamps with which to make further overprintings. An order for additional fiscal stamps from the American Bank Note Company had first to be made and delivery of these stamps from the United States took some time. There is some ambiguity in the reports of the number of stamps of the second printing. According to the Saenz catalogue, and the original Bailey article, authorising Decree Nº.784 specified that the number of each of the three denominations should be implemented by a further 10,000 copies. In the 1984 article, however, Bailey wrote that the number of each denomination was increased so that a grand total of 10,000 copies of each denomination were issued i.e. 8,000 of each of the C2.00 and C3.00 values, and 8,500 of the C5,000 value. It is much more likely that a round number i.e. 10,000 copies of each denomination would have been ordered.

Differences Between the Two Printings

Although it was the aim of the postal authorities to make the second printing identical to that of the first so that the two speculators should 'have their fingers burnt', it was inevitable that small differences between the two printings do allow identification. In this regard the Scott catalogue is of no help as they only list the three basic stamps (Scott C11-13) with a footnote "There were two separate printings of this issue which were practically identical in the colors of the stamps and the surcharges". Gibbons give separate full catalogue status to each printing, the first printing being Nº.187-189, the second printing being Nº.190-192. Possible help in distinguishing the two printings is that Gibbons state for the first printing "Toned paper. Brownish vermilion surcharge", and for the second printing "White paper. Scarlet surcharge.".

The Saenz catalogue sets out to be more helpful: "The first printing - overprint brownish vermilion, very pale cream paper. The bars on the 'C' sign on the C2 and C3 overprints inclined at 77º. The second printing - scarlet overprint, white paper, the bars of the 'C' sign on all values inclined at 70º.". There is also a black and white illustration of the C2.00 overprint on the C2 fiscal stamp of 1929, which although sufficient to allow identification of a stamp as beig from this series, is nevertheless next to useless as far as sorting out the two printings.

How then best to distinguish stamps of these two printings? At first sight the basic differences of colour of paper (when the reordered fiscal stamps arrived they were on whiter paper) and distinctive colour (scarlet as opposed to reddish brown) of overprint ink should make sorting an easy task. Unfortunately with the passage of time the gum of the second printing (comment by Cohen) invariably turned browner and imparted a yellow/

brown colour of the paper so that after some sixty years the colour of the paper is almost impossible to use as a diagnostic criterion, especially if one is looking at a single stamp in isolation. Similarly the colour of the ink of the overprint is invariably found to have altered with time from the original brighter scarlet to a darker colour. Thus the basic colour characteristics mentioned in Gibbons are not very helpful.

A more reliable characteristic is the form of the 'C' sign. The overprints (surcharges) in all other respects are remarkably similar for both printings. Bailey provides the best description of the two forms of the 'C' signs:

> "There were two types of font used for the 'C' sign, one with the bars at an angle of 70° and the other with them at an angle of 77°. On the former, the right-hand bar crosses the 'C' where the serif begins; on the latter, this bar cuts the body of the 'C' about ¼ mm from the serif. The vertical extension beyond the top of the 'C' is more pronounced on the 70° type."

I find this description of the two types of 'C' to be the most helpful, in particular whether the bars cut through the serif. With a small accumulation of these stamps one easily sorts out the two printings of both the C2.00 and C3.00 overprinted stamps. Such stamps can then be used as reference material allowing distinction of the C5.00 values based on nuances of colour of paper and ink of overprint.

The Overprints

Overprinting was done by Imprenta Nacional in San Jose. The regularity of the overprints suggest that the individual cliches were made by electrotyping and not by handsetting, and that the master setrings of the three electrotypes of the first printing must have been set up individually with the 'C' sign of the C5.00 (70°) value being different from that of the other two values (77°). What is extremely mysterious is that between the first and second printings (authorising Decrees 758 and 784 were only a matter of a few days apart), using the evidence provided by the different 'C' forms, the first printing plates had been dismantled and replacement plates had to be made for the second printing. It is reasonable to assume that if the plates used for the C2.00 and C3.00 values had been destroyed the one used to print the C5.00 value had also not survived.

Covers

As far as we know the only covers extant with the high value provisional stamps were philatelically contrived. Since the whole of the first printing had been cornered by Quiros and Hammer it would be surprising if any of these stamps ever went through the posts on anything other than philatelically-contrived covers. An example of a stamp from either printing on a commercially used envelope would be a great rarity. Cohen stated that as far as he knew all first day covers of the first printing bear the name of Ernesto Hammer and

the 1984 article was illustrated with such a cover to New York with a total franking of C2.55 which did not correspond to any known rate. Paulsen K Bailey reported that he had a first day cover addressed to Sanabria but unfortunately the total amount of the franking was not specified.

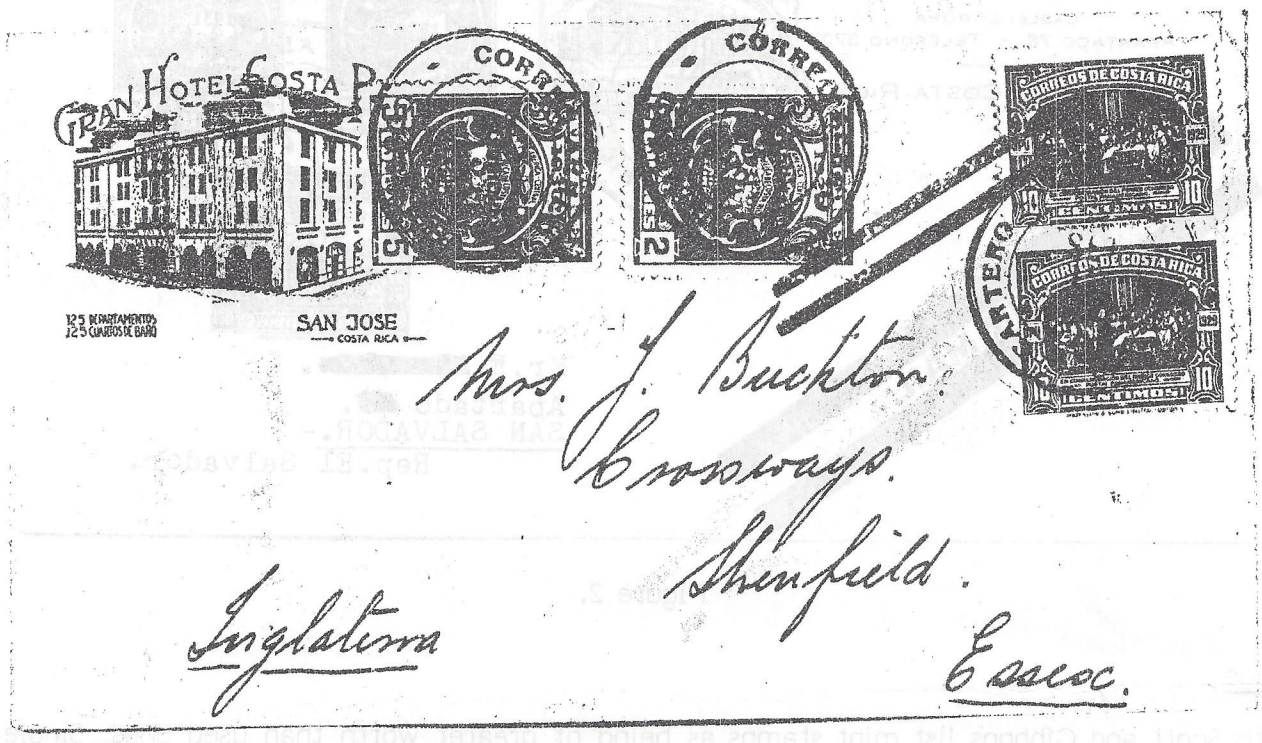


Figure 1.

Both Mark Spycher and myself have airmail covers with high value provisional stamps and we speculate there are many similar covers. Mark's cover (figure 1) has a total franking of C5.20 (including one each of the second printing of the C2.00 and C3.00 stamps) sent to Europe 13 September 1932. The cover has all the hallmarks of a genuinely flown cover i.e. the cover bears the familar two line mark of Varrick Street, New York, applied to show that after New York, airmail service was not available. The cover in my collection (figure 2) was sent registered airmail service to San Salvador 27 May 1932 and has a total franking of C5.35 including C2.00 and C3.00 values of the second printing. Interestingly Mark's cover was sent using an envelope with the Gran Hotel, Costa Rica 'corner card', and my cover was an envelope with the Gran Hotel Europa 'corner card'. Neither cover bears frankings corresponding to known postal rates so they were both philatelically inspired. Probably stamps of the second printing were also bought up by philatelists and one of them had the propensity to use hotel stationery. The only other cover that I have a record of was offered for sale as Lot 14 in the 15 December 1984 auction sale of the Costa Rican Philatelic Society, San Jose. This cover, sent to Germany 12 December 1932, had all three stamps of the second printing. The vendors claimed this to be the only recorded example of all these three stamps used on a single cover.

Figure 2.

Value

Both Scott and Gibbons list mint stamps as being of greater worth than used ones. Single used stamps are, however, very scarce and a reverse pricing would be more realistic. Gibbons, the only major catalogue that prices stamps of both printings, list stamps of the first printing as being more valuable. On the basis of print runs of 1,500 and 10,000 this would be logical. O'Neill reported, however, that Lic Alvaro Bonilla Lara in his 'Collecion de Leyes de Decretos' had stated that in 1935 the Government of Costa Rica incinerated 7,562 copies of the C2.00 value, 7,985 copies of the C3.00 value and 7,756 copies of the C5.00 value - all of the second printing. This suggests that the actual numbers of the second printing stamps sold were 2,438 of the C2.00, 2,015 of the C3.00 and 2,244 of the C5.00 value. In other words the true numbers of stamps from either printing actually sold were similar and all these stamps are equally scarce and desirable items - or rather, would be, if collectors were willing to overlook the cornering of the issue and not to deem them undesirable items.

Continued from page 299

The corner card promotes an upcoming Mediterranean-and-Orient cruise by the Aller, sailing February 5, 1898. The cover bearing the official seals transited New York on January 29, 1898. The Aller then had one week in which to prepare for its cruise.

I would be pleased to hear from anyone who has seen other uses of these official seals.

RAILWAYS IN THE PANAMA CANAL ZONE

by DR ANTHONY GOODBODY

Introduction

The stamps of Panama and the Canal Zone can be used to form one of the most interesting collections in the whole album from the point of view of the railway philatelist. There have, at one time or another, been three types of railway activity in the area. When the canal was built, temporary tracks were laid down for the purposes of removing the spoil, and now that the canal is in operation, electric 'mules' are used to haul ships through the locks. Far older than either of these is the Panama Railroad, opened in 1855.

Historical Background

Panama proclaimed her independence from Spain on 28 November 1821. In 1822 she became part of Great Colombia and , in 1830, part of New Granda which later became the Republic of Colombia. The ensuing period until 1903, when Panama finally attained complete independence, was marked by very strained relations with the reat of Colombia and punctuated by various attempts at gaining independence. The other important factor in the history of nineteenth century Panama was the interest taken by the United States and Great Britain, who were anxious to construct a canal from the Atlantic to the Pacific. The routs across the isthmus had been used for centuries and the idea of a canal had been mooted as long ago as 1529. Various routes had been suggested but by 1850 these had been reduced to two - one through Nicaragua and the other through Panama. As a preliminary, to establish the latter route, the Panama Railroad was completed in 1855.

The history of the construction of the canal is well known. In 1879 Ferdinand de Lesseps, encouraged by his success with the Suez canal, attempted to construct a sea-level canal through the Panama isthmus. The project was abandoned in 1889, leaving behind it a mass of rusting machinery. The United States Government then took control and in 1903 concluded a treaty with the Government of Colombia whereby the United States was granted a 100 year lease of a strip of land 10 miles wide, across the isthmus. At the same time a bloodless revolution, conducted with the connivance of the United States, finally gained Panama her independence. The construction of the canal took place during the years 1904-14 under the supervision of the Isthmian Canal Commission, a body appointed by President Theodore Roosevelt of the United States. The plan for a sea-level canal, favoured by de Lesseps, was abandoned in favour of one involving a series of three groups of locks. Proceeding from north (the Atlantic end) to south, the first locks are at Gatun where vessels are raised 85 feet in three steps. At the southern end of the Culebra Cut (later named the Gaillard Cut) are the Pedro Miguel Locks where vessels are lowered 31 feet into Miraflores lake at the southern end of which are the Miraflores Locks through which vessels descend to sea level.

Definitive Issue, 1928; 25th Anniversary of the Opening of the Panama Canal, 1939; 150th Anniversary of the Birth of Ferdinand Lesseps, 1955; (SG 109, 157; SG 571 Panama)

Several stamps show the muck trains used for removing the spoil. On some of them can be seen the Bucyrus steam shovels which also ran on railway tracks. Chief in the latter category are the 5¢ definitive of 1929 and the 11¢ of the 25th Anniversary set of 1939. The 5¢ stamp shows the excavation of the Culebra Cut in 1907. Muck trains and the temporary railways on which they ran can also be seen on the 1¢, 3¢, 6¢ and 8¢ values of the 25th Anniversary set (not illustrated).

As far as I know the French period is represented by a single stamp. The 25¢ value of the 1955 set issued by the Republic of Panama to commemorate the 150th Anniversary of the birth of Ferdinand de Lesseps shows a muck train and a steam shovel.

Definitive Issue, 1928-1948; (SG 111-3, 115, 192-3)

The Canal Zone definitive stamps (5¢ illustrated) have tended to feature portraits of the members of the Isthmian Canal Commission. Not surprisingly, several of these gentlemen have had previous railway experience. With the exception of Gaillard (12¢) who was sometime President of the Panama Railroad, they were not directly connected with the railway in Panama but had important jobs on railways in the United States or elsewhere. Members of the commission falling into this category are Sibert, Smith, Stevens, Wallace and Williamson.

W L Silbert (14¢) (1860-1935) was chief engineer in charge of the reconstruction of the Manila-Dagupan Railway in the Phillipine Islands and from 1907-1913 in charge of the Gatun Locks, Gatun Dam and the excavation of the Canal from Gatun to the Atlantic.

Jackson Smith (15¢) (1864-1910) worked on the Louisville & Nashville Railroad and then on the railways in Ecuador, Colombia, Mexico and Jamaica. From 1907-8 he recruited labour and handled labour problems on the Canal. In 1908 he became Vice President and General Manager of the Oregon Direct Line Railroad.

S B Williamson (30¢) (1865-1939) was an engineer who worked for the Chicago, Burlington & Northern, the St Paul & Dulruth and the Northern Pacific Railroads. Later he was in

charge of lock, dam and harbour construction in the Canal Zone.

John F Stevens (5¢ of 1946) was Chief Engineer of the Canal Project from 1905-7. Earlier he had worked on the Great Northern Railway and in 1904 became second Vice President of the Rock Island Line.

J F Wallace (25¢ of 1946) (1852-1931) was the first Chief Engineer of the Panama Canal, from 1904-5. Previously he had held important posts on the Peoria & Farmington Railroad, the Central Iowa Railway, the Santa Fe and the Illinois Central.

25th Anniversary of the Opening of the Panama Canal, 1939;
(SG 159-60, and Panama SG 357)

A few other stamps show the railway incidentally. Two of these are the 14¢ and 15¢ values of the 1939 set issued to mark the 25th Anniversary of the completion of the canal. These stamps show the railway at Gamboa before and after the completion of the Panama Canal. The Republic of Panama also issued a 25th Anniversary set and the ½¢ value shows the railway at Gatun.

Centenary of the Panama Railroad, 1955; (SG 212)

There are two stamps directly connected with the Panama Railroad. All the rest are concerned in some way with the canal. The Panama Railroad Company was promoted in 1847 by Stephens, Aspinwall and Chauncy. John L Stevens was a distinguished travel writer, while Aspinwall and Chauncy were financiers. A preliminary survey was carried out in the winter of 1847 and a concession obtained fom the Government of New Granada. It was signed in Washington on 28 December 1848.

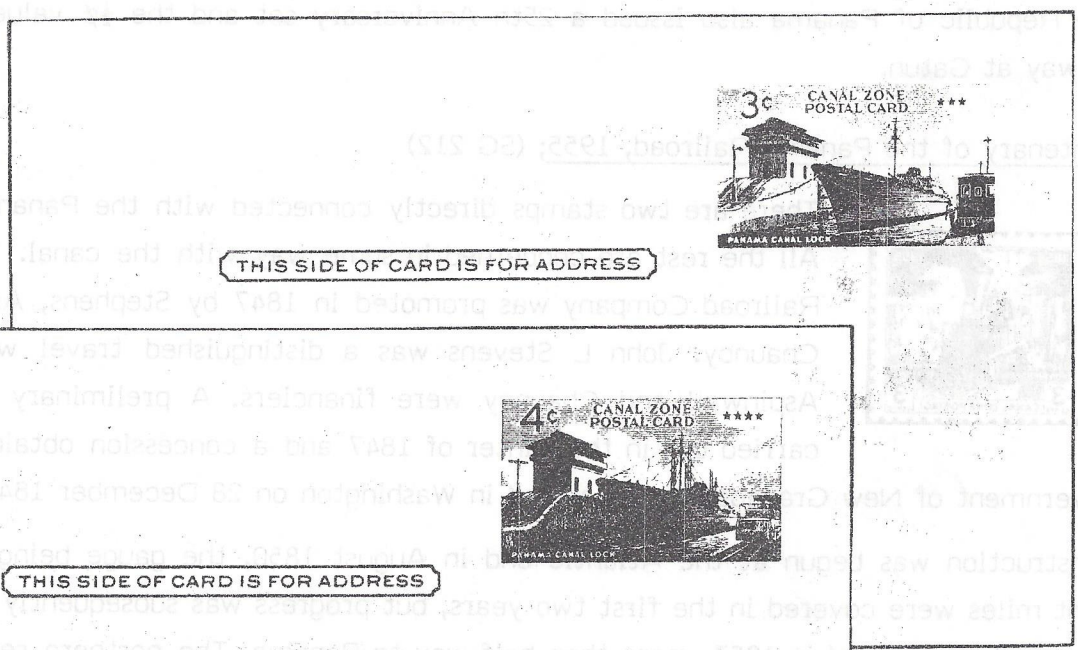
Construction was begun at the Atlantic end in August 1850, the gauge being 5 ft. Only eight miles were covered in the first two years, but progress was subsequently more rapid. Gamboa was reached in 1853, more than half way to Panama. The northern section of the line was easily graded although parts of it were laid on swampland. The difficulties in the way of building the southern section were of a more formidable nature because the terrain is hilly. However, construction proceeded apace and on 27 January 1855 the line was opened from Colon to Panama City, a distance of 48 miles.

The centenary of the opening of the railway was marked by the issue of a single 3¢ stamp. The identification of the locomotive on this stamp is not easy. Early records of the Panama Railroad have been destroyed by fire and several changes of ownership have resulted in the loss of many of the records which have survived the flames. Nevertheless a fairly complete stocklist of locomotives has been compiled by Alexander Saunders and published in the May 1950 bulletin of the Railway and Locomotive Historical Society. Apart from three rack locomotives built in Cincinnati to negotiate particularly difficult gradients, all the early locomotives were built by the Portland Locomotive Company. The first of these was named 'Nueva Granada' and it is believed that this is the locomotive shown on SG 212. It was completed on 26 October 1852, works number 37, and she had 54 inch diameter coupled wheels and 13 x 20 inch cylinders. She differed from the other locomotives in having outside frames and inside connected cylinders.

Another event which marked the railway centenary was the re-establishment, for a single trip, of the Panama Canal R.P.O. which had been discontinued on 15 May 1954.

Definitive Issue, 1978; SG 251

The electric towing vehicles, known as 'mules' may be seen on the Canal Zone postal stationery.


3¢ CANAL ZONE POSTAL CARD ***
PANAMA CANAL LOCK
THIS SIDE OF CARD IS FOR ADDRESS
4¢ CANAL ZONE POSTAL CARD ****
THIS SIDE OF CARD IS FOR ADDRESS

Basically these are the 3¢ card issued on 1 November 1958 and the 4¢ card issued on 12 August 1965, the 5¢ card issued on 1 April 1969 and the 8¢ card issued subsequently. The 3¢ card shows an earlier version of the towing locomotive. The best view of a mule is however shown on SG 251 (below right).

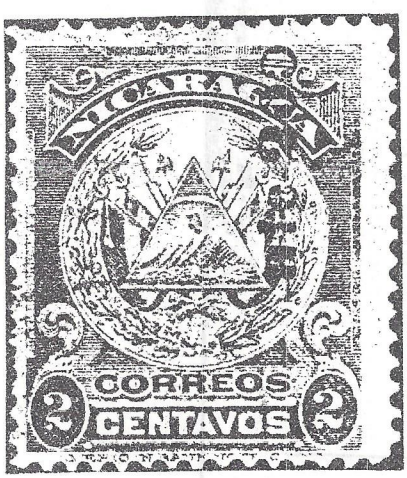
A 'mule' may also be seen on the 20¢ value of the 25th Anniversary set (SG 162, above left), on the 1¢ value of the equivalent set issued by the Republic (SG 358) and on two Panama stamps issued in 1989 for the 75th Anniversary of the opening of the canal (below).

125th Anniversary of the Opening of the Panama Railroad, 1980; (SG 1150 of Panama)

The design shows a train in the terminus station at Colon. The scene appears to be authentic and based on a contemporary print. It is my hope that a reader will be able to identify it.

Acknowledgement. I am indebted to the official publication 'Canal Zone Postage Stamps', published jointly by the Canal Zone Postal Service and the Canal Zone Government in 1961 for much of the information in this article.

oooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo

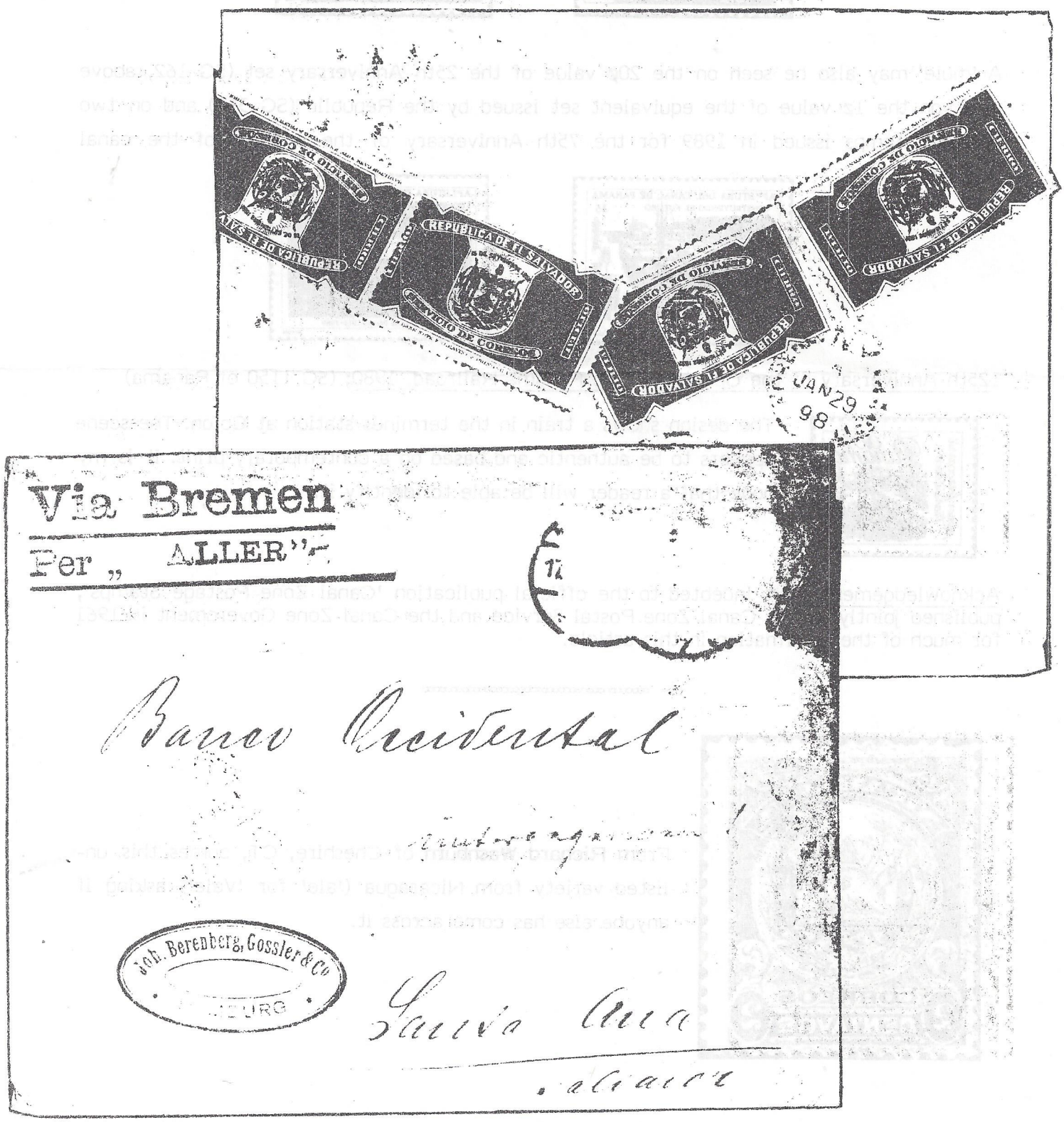


From **Richard Washburn** of Cheshire, CT, comes this unlisted variety from Nicaragua ('ale' for 'Vale') asking if anyone else has come across it.

SEEBECK OFFICIAL SEALS OF EL SALVADOR

by BILL WELCH

The 1896 official seals of El Salvador, printed by the Hamilton Bank Note Engraving & Printing Company of New York, have always been viewed with a jaundiced eye. Few collectors seems persuaded that they ever saw use. Only Yvert, of the major catalogues, lists them - and it describes them as timbres de retour (return stamps). There are two shades of the seals: brown and olive-brown. The seals pictured here are brown.



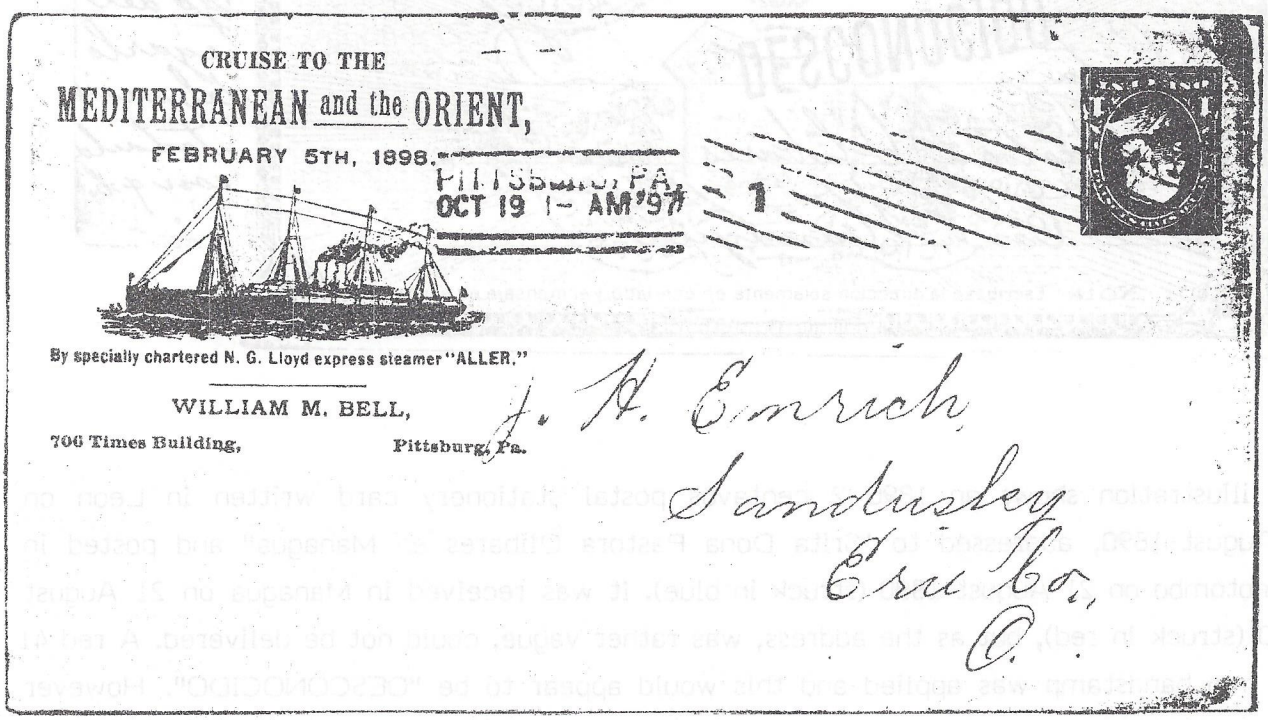
The cover pictured opposite offers some evidence that the seals indeed were used, if rarely, for their intended purpose: sealing envelopes and packages found open in the mails.

The cover originated in Hamburg and was addressed to a bank in Santa Ana, El Salvador. It was marked to trabel by way of the port of Bremen, where it was placed on board the North German Lloyd express steamer Aller, which could maintain a speed of seventeen knots. The cover was ailed early in January 1898; the exact date was lost when the German stamps were soaked off the cover. Although not apparent in the photocopies, the cover is somewhat wrinkled and shows clear evidence of having been in water.

At first glance I was tempted to think that this was a wreck cover, but subsequent research proves otherwise.

The Aller was built in 1886 and scrapped in 1904. The first trans-Atlantic liner with triple expansion engines, she served on the Bremen-Southampton-New York and Mediterranean-New York routes.

One can only speculate as to how the water damage to the cover occurred: a bag dropped into the harbour while transferring mail from ship to shore; a leaky roof or window in the post office in San Salvador. The contact with water presumably occurred after the cover left New Yrk on its way to El Salvador. Had it happened earlier, one might expect to find German or U.S. seals on the cover.

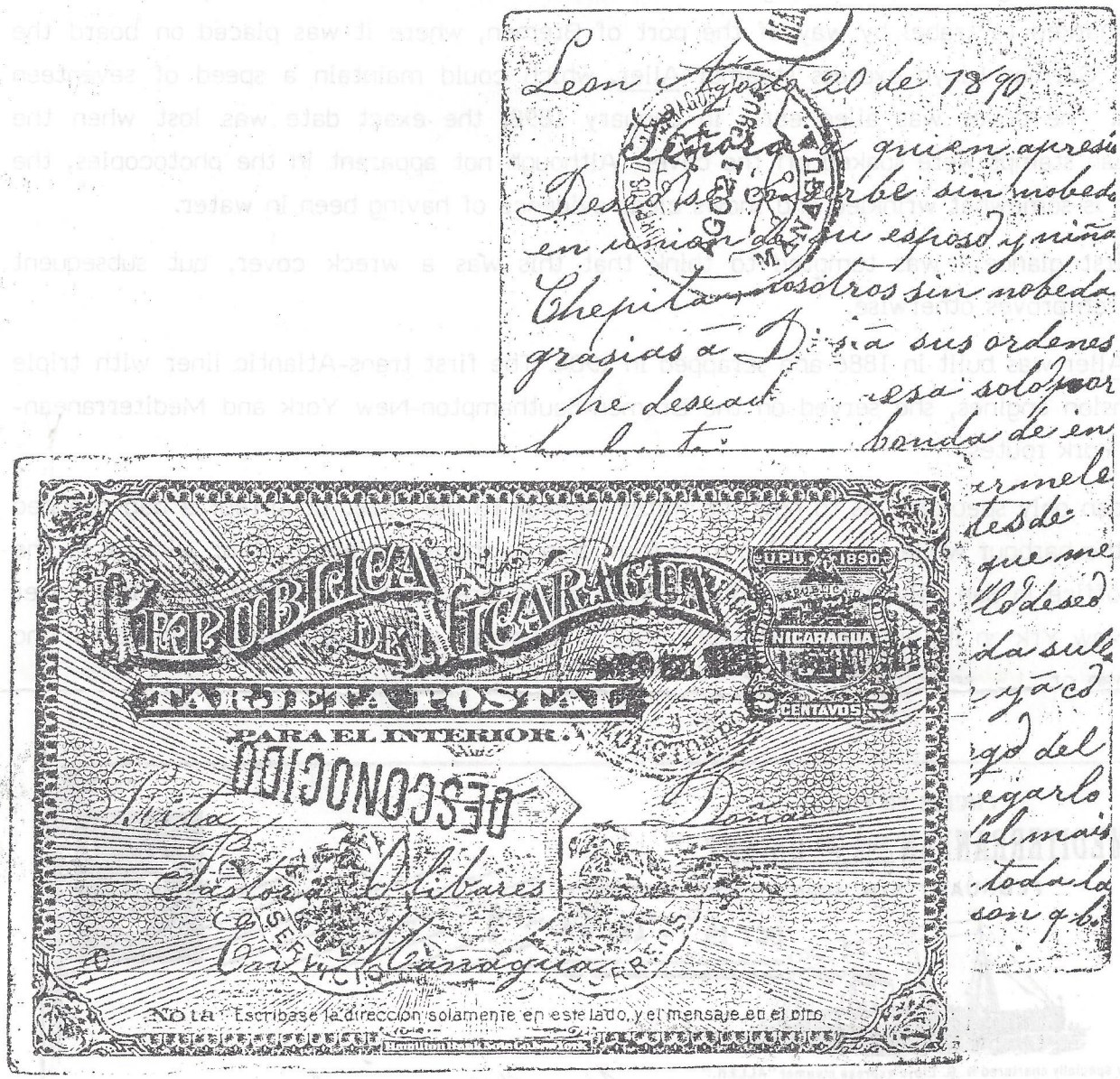


There is an interesting philatelic footnote to the Aller. Pictured above is an October 19, 1897, cover mailed from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to Sandusky, Ohio.

Continued on page 292

A FURTHER INSTRUCTIONAL MARK OF NICARAGUA

by DENIS KILNER



The illustration shows an 1890 2 centavos postal stationery card written in Leon on 20 August 1890, addressed to "Srita Dona Pastora Olibares en Managua" and posted in Momotombo on 21 August 1890 (struck in blue). It was received in Managua on 21 August 1890 (struck in red), but as the address, was rather vague, could not be delivered. A red 41 x 8 mm handstamp was applied and this would appear to be "OESCONOCIDO". However there seems to be no such word in the Spanish dictionary until you read the handstamp as "DESCONOCIDO", which means "UNKNOWN".

Another item to add to the list of instructional marks.

Are there any others?